

FEBRUARY 2022

*The Homeless Programs Office (HPO) newsletter contains news and information about VA's ongoing effort to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans.*



## Executive Director's Message | Around HPO

### COVID-19 Response | Staff Spotlight | Fact of the Month

*Veterans who are homeless or at imminent risk of homelessness are strongly encouraged to contact the [National Call Center for Homeless Veterans](#) at (877) 4AID-VET (877-424-3838) for assistance.*

## Message From Monica Diaz, Executive Director, VHA Homeless Programs Office



Although the Winter Olympics commenced in Beijing this month, the gold medal ceremony I am most excited to watch will take place in Washington, DC. The recipients? The surviving members of the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion—the “Six Triple Eight” for short. As the only unit comprised entirely of Black women in World War II, the Six Triple Eight overcame all odds to ensure American troops on the front line received letters from loved ones at home. The Battalion’s motto, “No Mail, Low Morale,” encapsulated the critical role mail played in maintaining the spirit of service members.

In February 1945, Six Triple Eight arrived in England to their post, full of post (17 million pieces to be exact)! 99-year-old Lena King is 1 of just 6 living members of

this iconic battalion; in a recent TODAY Show interview, she described the unit's motivation: "We wanted to show proof that we loved our country, even if they didn't love us back all the time." Though the women answered Uncle Sam's call voluntarily, their homecoming was defined by a much uglier American personification: Jim Crow.

77 years after their service, the U.S. House of Representatives will vote on joining their Senate counterparts in supporting awarding the Congressional Gold Medal to the Six Triple Eight this month. Celebrating these heroic women is long overdue—the delay is an uncomfortable reminder that too often, the contributions of black Americans to our nation have been overlooked. This Black History Month, VA is hoping to help change this pattern by telling the stories of the brave Black men and women who have served our nation in our [Black History Month Vantage Point series](#). I urge each of you to read these amazing stories, as they feature some of the finest examples of character and courage our nation has ever seen.

[Read Monica's full message.](#)

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## Around HPO



### [2021 PIT Count Data and Updates on Veteran Homelessness](#)

On February 4, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) released the results of the 2021 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, the annual effort to estimate the number of Americans, including Veterans, without permanent housing.

The results showed that on a single night in January 2021, there were 19,750 Veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness in the U.S. – reflecting a 10% decrease in the number of Veterans experiencing sheltered homelessness from 2020. We're proud to announce that this also represents the largest one-year decline since 2015 to 2016.

Read about the efforts made to accomplish these goals as well as other notable insights [here](#).

### [Federal Health and Social Service Programs That Support People Experiencing Homelessness](#)

A new tool was created to help state and local leaders identify and access federal non-emergency health and social service programs so they can use multiple streams of funding for holistic supportive services that meet the short- and long-term needs of people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The tool breaks down important information for each program,



including populations served, allowable uses, number of participants served, geographic reach, and more. To access the tool, click [here](#).



## [The State of Veteran Homelessness 2021](#)

Few conditions are more harmful to individual health and welfare than homelessness. That’s why VA is committed to making sure every Veteran has a safe and stable place to call home. Working in partnership with federal, state, and local community organizations across the country, VA provides wraparound services that integrate housing, health care, employment, and education assistance programs to support at-risk Veterans and help those experiencing homelessness exit and remain stably housed. VA and its partners have dedicated unprecedented resources to help solve this problem – but there is still more work to be done. [See the infographic explaining how VA is tackling the challenge, and how you can help.](#)

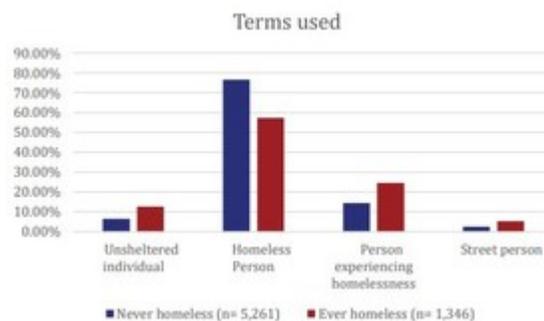
### [Referential Terms for Homeless Populations: National Surveys of Adults with Lived Experiences, Researchers, Providers, and Policymakers](#)

Have you ever wondered what the appropriate terminology is when referring to a person experiencing homelessness?

The [VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans](#) conducted a nationally representative survey of 6,607 middle- and low-income U.S. adults with and without lived experiences of homelessness in 2020 and a separate national survey of 354 U.S. researchers, providers, and policymakers working in the homeless service field about terms they use when referring to homeless populations.

The study concluded that most stakeholder groups agree that “homeless person” or “person experiencing homelessness” are common and acceptable terms. However, because language usage may vary by background, profession, and individual, it may be best practice to ask individuals what terms they prefer to use.

[Click here](#) to read the full research brief.



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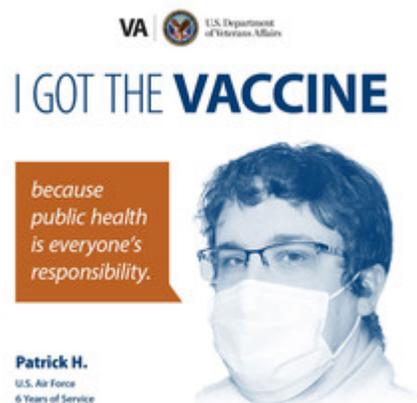
## HPO COVID-19 Response and Updates

As we continue to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, CDC continues to recommend masking as a critical strategy to prevent the spread of the virus. With several types of masks on the market, you may be wondering which is the most likely to keep you protected.

The best options are N95 and KN95 masks, as they are types of respirators. However, the CDC also recognizes that some individuals may not find these masks as comfortable and may have a harder time acquiring them.

If you are unable to obtain a N95 or KN95 mask, a surgical or disposable face mask underneath a cloth mask will provide you with enhanced protection by improving the fit of the masks while adding another layer of protection.

[Learn more about proper mask fit and performance.](#)



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## HPO Staff Spotlight: Deborah Lee



As a HUD-VASH Regional Coordinator, Deborah Lee has the unique opportunity to support staff in her field who have among the most difficult jobs at VA – providing support to vulnerable Veterans in community-based settings. Her role encourages her to frequently engage in advocacy efforts on behalf of Veterans and staff members, including ensuring that staff members have access to the essential resources they need to accomplish their daily work.

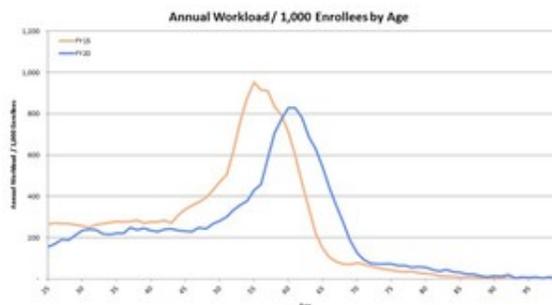
Lee is also involved in the collaboration between [HUD-VASH and VA's Geriatrics and Extended Care Services](#), which aims to address the needs of aging and disabled

Veterans by finding innovative ways to use existing resources and forge new partnerships. Her ability to identify the best ways to modify VA's services to best meet the needs of older Veterans is outstanding and has contributed to meaningful changes across many of VA's programs. To learn more about Lee's experience working in homeless prevention, [read the full feature](#).

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## HPO Fact of the Month

Did you know the average age of Veterans using VHA Homeless Programs services is 62 years old, with nearly half of recipients between 60-90 years of age? VA is continually reviewing our systems to ensure they are supporting the urgent needs of older Veterans, who are experiencing homelessness at unprecedented rates.



In response to this data, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing ([HUD-VASH](#)) program is partnering with VA's [Geriatrics and Extended Care program](#) to help provide updates for aging Veterans across VA. To learn more about the partnership, [click here](#).